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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
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USIA-06 OMB-01 SSM-03 IO-13 DHA-02 /076 W
----------031415 210745Z /21
R 210900Z JUL 77
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4632
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3495

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, LE
SUBJECT: LEBANON INTERNAL: CONVERSATION WITH MARONITE PATRIARCH

1. SUMMERY. AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH MARONITE PATRIARCH TO DISCUSS INTERNAL SITUATION AND SITUATION IN SOUTH. PATRIARCH ACKNOWLEDGES NEED FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE FACTIONS AND IS WORKING TO THAT END. HE CHARACTERIZES SITUATION IN SOUTH AS INTOLOERABLE AND SAYS THAT IF IT CONTINUES HE PLANS TO EVACUATE HIS FAMILY FROM AIN IBL. PATRIARCH REMAINS CONVINCED ISRAELIS HAVE DESIGN ON LEBANON SOUTH OF LITANI. END SUMMARY.

2. I HAD LUNCH WITH MARONITE PATRIARCH AT BKERKE AT HIS REQUEST JULY 20. HE SAID HE HAD ASKED ME TO COME IN ORDER TO GET MY APPRECIATION OF LEBANESE INTERNAL SITUATION AND INTERNATIONAL POSITION. HE WANTED TO KNOW WHETHER WE MORE OR LESS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT FUTURE OF LEBANON, WHAT WE HAD IN MIND FOR THIS COUNTRY AND WHAT I COULD TELL HIM ABOUT SITUATION IN SOUTH.

3. I SAID THERE WERE REASONS FOR BOTH PESSIMISM AND OPTIMISM. ON ECONOMIC SIDE THERE HAD BEEN CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS IN PAST SIX
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MONTHS AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY WAS UP. PORT OF BEIRUT, FOR INSTANCE, WAS WORKING AT ABOUT 60 PERCENT OF NORMAL. ON OTHER HAND, IMPORTS WERE LARGELY OF CONSUMER GOODS AS OPPOSED TO CAPITAL AND INDUSTRIAL EQUIPMENT AND PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY OF COUNTRY DID NOT SEEM TO BE GROWING FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS, MOST OF THEM RELATED TO SECURITY PROBLEM. ON POLITICAL SIDE, I HAD BEEN STRUCK SINCE MY ARRIVAL WITH THE LACK OF CONTACT AND

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DIALOGUE BETWEEN DIFFERENT FACTIONS AND HAD BEEN PREACHING A NEED FOR SUCH DIALOGUE TO EVERYBODY I MET. WHILE CERTAIN OF THE PARTIES WERE STILL MAINTAINING VERY HARD-NOSED POSITIONS, THERE WAS SOME PROGRESS TO REPORT EVEN IN THIS RESPECT. WE HAD INVITED ALL POLITICAL LEADERS, FOR INSTANCE, TO OUR FOURTH OF JULY RECEPTION AND, WHILE A NUMBER OF THEM HAD TURNED THEIR BACKS TO EACH OTHER, IT WAS SURPRISING HOW MANY INVETERATE ENEMIES HAD BEEN WILLING TO SHAKE HANDS AND TALK TO EACH OTHER. THERE WERE OTHER SIGNS THAT OPPOSITION TO DIALOGUE WAS SOFTENING, BUT PROCESS NEEDED SOME ENCOURAGEMENT, PERHAPS FROM PRESIDENT SARKIS HIMSELF.

4. WITH REGARD TO SOUTH, IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO DETERMINE WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR CONTINUED FIRING AND INCIDENTS. WE HAD DISCUSSED SITUATION WITH ISRAELIS ON NUMBER OF OCCASIONS AND HAD BEEN ASSURED BY THEM THE HAD NO INTENTION OCCUPYING SOUTH LEBANON OR ANY OTHER PART OF LEBANON FOR THAT MATTER. WE TOOK THESE ASSURANCES AT FACE VALUE AND WERE CONFIDENT ISRAELIS HAD NO PLAN STRIKE AT LEBANON. ON OTHER HAND, ISRAELIS WOULD NOT STAND STILL FOR RESUMPTION OF CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITIES BY PALESTINIANS AND WE COULD BE SURE THEY WOULD REACT STRONGLY IF THAT HAPPENED.

5. WITH REGARD TO US INTENTIONS, WE ENVISAGED A CONTINUATION OF OUR ECONOMIC SUPPORT WHICH, ALTHOUGH MODEST IN SIZE, WAS DESIGNED GIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST TO KEY AREAS OF LEBANESE ECONOMY. WE ALSO HOPED TO HAVE PROGRAM OF ASSISTIANCE FOR LEBANESE ARMY, BUT THAT HAD RUN INTO PROBLEMS ON THE HILL, WHERE SENATORS HAD ASKED CONFIDENTIAL

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US NUMBER OF DIFFICULT QUESTIONS ON SUBJECT. I HOPED WE WOULD HAVE SUCH A PROGRAM BUT COULD NOT YET FORECAST WHAT IT WOULD BE. WE WOULD AT SAME TIME CONTINUE OUR EFFORTS TO HELP WITH POLITICAL SITUATION, USING OUR INFLUENCE WITH VARIOUS LEBANESE LEADERS IN EFFORT PROMOTE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND USING OUR INFLUENCE WITH SYRIANS AND ISRAELIS TO PREVENT SITUATION IN SOUTH FROM GETTING OUT OF HAND. ALL THESE EFFORTS, HOWEVER, WERE SECONDARY TO EFFORT WHICH LEBANESE MUST MAKE TO SETTLE THEIR OWN DIFFERENCES.

6. PATRIARCH SAID UNITED STATES, WHICH GUARANTEED ISRAEL'S SURVIVAL, WAS ONLY POWER WHICH WOULD GUARANTEE ISRAELIS WOULD NOT INVADE LEBANON. I SAID WE COULD USE OUR INFLUENCE WITH ISRAEL, BUT WE COULD NOT GUARANTEE WHAT ISRAELIS WOULD DO. IN FINAL ANALYSIS THEY WOULD MAKE DECISIONS ON BASIS THEIR PERCEPTION THEIR OWN NATIONAL INTEREST. THEY HAD TOLD US, HOWEVER, THEY DID NOT THINK IT WAS IN THEIR NATIONAL INTEREST TO OCCUPY SOUTH LEBANON. THEY HAD ALSO TOLD US THAT THEY FELT THEY HAD AN OBLIGATION TO PROTECT CHRISTIANS OF BORDER AREAS AND THAT WAS JUSTIFICATION FOR THEIR ACTIONS.

7. PATRIARCH SAID HE WONDERED ABOUT ISRAELI MOTIVATIONS. HE WAS CONVINCED THAT THEY STILL HAD DESIGNS ON AREAS SOUTH OF LITANI

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AND THAT WAS ONLY WAY ONE COULD EXPLAIN CERTAIN ACTIONS OF THEIRS, SUCH AS FACT THEY HAD ALLOWED PALESTINIANS TO REOCCUPY AL KHIAM (THIS IS RECURRING THEME IN MY CONVERSATIONS IN RECENT WEEKS, I.E. THE ISRAELIS WOULD HAVE PREVENTED PALESTINIANS FROM TAKING AL KHIAM AND DID NOT DO SO; THEREFORE THEY MUST HAVE SOME ULTERIOR MOTIVE). AS FOR PROTECTING CHRISTIANS, IF SITUATION CONTINUED AS IT WAS, HE WAS GOING TO EVACUATE ALL THE MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY FROM AIN IBL. SITUATION FOR CHRISTIANS WAS INTOLERABLE.

8. I ASKED PATRIARCH IF SITUATION WOULD ALSO HAVE BEEN INTOLERABLE HAD CHRISTIANS WITH ISRAELI SUPPORT NOT OPPOSED PALESTINIANS. WOULD LIFE UNDER PALESTINIANS HAVE BEEN TOLERABLE? PATRIARCH SAID CHRISTIANS AND PALESTINIANS HAD LIVED IN PEACE BEFORE, EVEN WHEN ISRAELIS WERE COMING ACROSS BORDER IN RETALIATORY RAIDS.
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SITUATION TODAY MUCH WORSE THAN IT WAS THEN. IF CHRISTIAN MILITIAS HAD NOT GONE TO THE SOUTH AND STARTED FIGHT, WE WOULD NOT BE IN PRESENT MESS. (NOTE: VIEWS ON THIS QUESTION VARY. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT PALESTINIANS ON ONE HAND HAVE MADE EFFORT TO REMAIN ON GOOD TERMS WITH LOCAL VILLAGERS, BUT THEIR ACCEPTABILITY TO THOSE VILLAGERS WAS GREATLY AFFECTED BY CIVIL WAR AND BY ATROCITIES COMMITTED BY BOTH SIDES.)

9. WITH REGARD TO INTERNAL SITUATION, PATRIARCH SAID HE DOING HIS BEST TO ENCOURAGE DIALOGUE, BUT CHAMOUN AND SOME OTHER WERE BEING OBDURATE. HE HAD ALSO SPOKEN TO PALESTINIANS, NOTABLY ABU IYAD, ABOUT FACT PALESTINIANS HAD FOULED THEIR OWN NEST AND THROUGH THEIR ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH HAD MADE THEMSELVES PERSONA NON GRATA TO PEOPLE OF THAT AREA. ABU IYAD HAD REPLIED THAT HE HOPED TO HAVE SOME GOOD NEWS FOR THE PATRIARCH IN A FEW DAYS (PERHAPS A REFERENCE TO PROPOSED NEW TRIPARTITE COORDINATING COMMITTEE). PATRIARCH AGREED THAT PRESIDENT SHOULD BE PLAYING MORE
ACTIVE ROLE IN PROMOTING NATIONAL CONCILIATION, BUT NOTED THAT HE WAS TIMID MAN WHO WAS AFRAID TO TAKE INITIATIVES FOR FEAR OF FALLING INTO ERROR. HE WOULD HAVE TO BE ENCOURAGED AND SUPPORTED (IMPLICATION WAS THAT THIS WOULD HAVE TO BE DONE BY US). WE BOTH AGREED ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVINE INTERVENTION.
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Message Attributes

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Channel Indicators: n/a
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770260-1258
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
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Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1796264
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LEBANON INTERNAL: CONVERSATION WITH MARONITE PATRIARCH
TAGS: PINT, PINS, LE, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/6bf06d66-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
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